Are the Walls of Injustice Tumbling Down?

By Rochelle R. Peterson & Erica R. Davila

Introduction

The discussion of multicultural education in teacher preparation dates back several decades. "The historical roots of multicultural education lie in the civil rights movements of various historically oppressed groups" (Gorski, 1999, p.1). As communities of color resisted institutional racism, schools became one of the sites of struggle. Thus, the concept of multicultural education is a response rooted in reforming education for liberation. However, according to Nieto and Bode (2008) many courses are not translating into culturally competent teaching. Gorski (2008) provides a critical analysis of the content of 45 undergraduate and graduate level courses in multicultural teacher education all across the nation and he found that "most multicultural education type courses are not designed to prepare teachers to do the work of multicultural education" (p. 18). Although we believe it is very complex to find the "magic" in providing teachers and pre-service teachers with the tools to engage in multicultural education as practice, we do believe that we can offer a piece in the mosaic that may bring us a step closer to producing culturally competent teachers.

Rochelle R. Peterson is an adjunct professor of education at Arcadia University, Glenside, Pennsylvania, and CEO of Perceptions Unlimited. Erica R. Davila is an assistant professor of education at Arcadia University.

Just like most reform ideas in education, multicultural education is defined differently from one city or town to the next, from one school to the next, and even from one teacher to the next. We aim to provide a glimpse into some of these classrooms and future classrooms by highlighting the learning experiences of teachers and future teachers. For this article, we will be focusing on our teaching and learning experience from one specific course that we teach at the same university. Both of us teach a graduate level foundations course entitled "Cultural Foundations of Education," offered in a department of education. Although we teach the course separately, we collaborate on the planning of the course and have reflected together on our experiences teaching this course. We will draw on student discussion and assignments from the Spring of 2007 through the Spring of 2009 to highlight the students' experiences and to exemplify the connection between theory and practice. This will also include experiences teaching the course on-line.

The vast majority of the students in our classes do not come to the course with the tools to have a real discussion on multiculturalism and cultural competency in teaching. When we say "real" discussion we are referring to a discussion that includes their own lived experiences and a critical analysis of their experiences within the larger social context. We encounter a range of pre-service and practicing teachers, from various areas of education and with a range of teaching experiences. Some of our students come to the course as new graduate students in education with no prior education studies background, while others are veteran teachers seeking certification in special education or other certification areas. We also have a small percentage of undergraduate students in their fourth or fifth year of a five year program. Our students are predominantly White, women, and able-bodied.

Similar to the findings of the abundance of research on teacher preparation and professional development (Almarza, 2005; Gorski, 2008; Kanpol & Brady, 2000; Nieto & Bode, 2008), our students stay on the surface of the multicultural education discussion. Staying on the surface is a comfortable place because going deeper is uncomfortable and many students have cognitive dissonance that immobilizes them. For the most part, they know that they should include visual representations of all cultures in the books and environmental print in their classrooms so that their students all feel validated. However, very few have thought about the endless and complex factors that come with the process of teaching from a multicultural perspective the way that Banks (2008) or Nieto and Bode (2008) define it; teachers taking social action, transforming the curriculum, and working from the sociopolitical perspective. As we teach this course, we strive to prepare teachers to consider the possibilities for them to be agents for social change as they work towards becoming authentic multicultural educators (Gorski, 2008). Our personal lived experiences coupled with our theoretical perspectives serve to inform our teaching pedagogy. Therefore, we begin this discussion with our lived experiences and how they impact our teaching.

Lived Experiences and Our Call to Action

> People can not be developed, they can only develop themselves. For while it is possible for an outsider to build a (wo)man's house, an outsider can not give the (wo)man pride and self-confidence in him/herself as a human being. Those things a (wo)man has to create her/himself by her/his own actions. S/he develops her/himself by what s/he does: s/he develops her/himself by making her/his own decisions, by increasing his/her own understanding of what s/he is doing, and why; by increasing his/her own knowledge and ability, by her/his own full participation as an equal in the life of the community s/he lives in. (Nyerere, 1973, p. 60. Note: gender neutral language added by authors.)

It is critical to the development of multicultural education for teachers to examine from where they came and therefore important for us to introduce the context from which we came to teach from a critical education perspective. We have reflected on the way our lived experiences have led us to teach this course from a similar theoretical perspective because we acknowledge the integral role that reflection plays in the teaching process.

In discussing our journey as teacher educators we both begin with our early experiences within educational institutions and the ways in which we were received by these institutions and how we received the institutions. Rochelle recalls being labeled as a gifted and accelerated student who knew how to "do school." While appreciating the academic challenges that came her way in her K-12 experience she began to realize how she was privileged in these institutions. This experience also made her aware of her peers who were not valued in the same way. Rochelle knew something was unjust about this reality but was unable to articulate the structure of educational inequity at that time. Erica reflects on her experience in early elementary school in a bilingual education program that did not value her native language and native culture. Similar to Rochelle at that moment Erica did not understand the structural inequity but she knew there was something unjust about this practice. In her professional experience in higher education administration, Rochelle saw the structural inequities unfold in various contexts within several institutions of higher education. After 18 years in higher education working toward equity in education she has transferred this experience into the teacher preparation classroom to help teachers develop their cultural competence. Erica's experience teaching elementary school provided a context in which the structural inequities she encountered as a student became clear. As a teacher she was able to see the ways in which certain students were valued because of their race, class, and language among other identity factors. As part of their ongoing reflection process as teacher educators, together Rochelle and Erica deconstruct their previous experiences in educational institutions as students, administrators and teachers.

Both instructors enter into the course with the bold expectation that critical examination of the forces that influence the hegemonic practice so many of us engage

in is the catalyst for change in school systems and higher educational institutions. Not only would that process be liberatory for the students and for the instructor but it would contribute to liberatory practice in schooling. Eventually, the paradigm in schools would shift from banking methods, which are methods of teaching based on the assumption that students are the bank into which the teacher deposits knowledge (Banks, 2008), to liberatory and authentically multicultural methods. Our teaching methodology of choice, critical pedagogy, is liberatory education, in that knowledge is freedom. Liberatory methods assume that starting with a foundational understanding of how students make meaning maximizes learning and is a political act validating their lived experiences (Freire, 1973; Giroux 1988; McLaren, 2003).

Furthermore, teaching the cultural foundations course as critical educators, we challenge teachers to be aware of power relations and how they drive occurrences like high-stakes testing, poor bilingual education programs, and zero tolerance policies that continue to leave children at a severe disadvantage. Consciously or not, teachers and counselors perpetuate values, beliefs, myths, and meanings about the world. As critical educators we argue that schools are entrenched in politics and more importantly that the systematic condition of schooling delivers a hidden curriculum to prepare youth for certain lifestyles and careers depending on race and social class backgrounds. This argument stems from the ideas rooted within the concept of critical theory. "Critical theory refers to the nature of self-conscious critique and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions" (Giroux, 2003, p. 27). From this perspective, we assume that this self-conscious critique and social transformation discourse will raise students' awareness of their power to empower and disadvantage children and serve to shift their thinking and practice in educational institutions as vehicles for social change.

Course Design

The Cultural Foundations of Education course is designed to increase preservice and in-service educators' cultural responsiveness/competence and, therefore, their critical reflection on their own beliefs about and practices in teaching and learning. It is designed around three units: (1) Introspection, Reflection, and Theoretical Insight; (2) Privilege, Oppression, and Identity Development; and (3) Multicultural Education: Theory to Practice. The overall objective of the design is to move students from a theoretical framework of the work we will use in the course and our paradigm for teaching and learning to the integration of multicultural education into their practice. We guide them through a more personal examination of societal forces that impact us all but often lay below our consciousness, particularly those for which we experience privilege or agent identities, to the investigation of methods utilized from transformative and social action paradigms of teaching in a multicultural society. This direction for the course is necessary from the standpoint that we must begin where the students are, placing their lived experiences in the center of investigation of theory, in order to help them better understand the social

forces that influence their and their students' lives. We can then move to critically examining personal and institutional practices that perpetuate privilege and oppression. Before we discuss methods in multicultural education we believe that it is essential for our students to critically think about who they will be as educators. They are rethinking their perspectives of education through new lenses that encourage them to place themselves within the larger social context. In the course we follow this progression because it is critical for K-12 teachers to be students of their students in order to affirm their identities (Nieto, 2004). Furthermore, the introspection and reflection process is threaded throughout the course because we strongly believe it is imperative for their ongoing professional development.

Introspection, Reflection, and Theoretical Insight

The objectives of this unit are to create a common language for race and culture; to deconstruct institutional, structural, and individual discrimination; to understand the role of schooling in the United States; and to begin to reflect on socializing forces that have influenced our beliefs and practices.

Borrowing from the field of anthropology, we begin the course by making the familiar strange with Horace Miner's "Body Ritual of the Nacirema" (1989). This article, originally published in the June 1956 edition of *American Anthropologist*, satirizes anthropogical papers about "other" cultures and the North American culture. The way in which he writes about the curious practices that this group performs distances readers from the fact that the group described actually corresponds to modern-day Americans. Students are asked on the first day to read the article in class and give their impressions of the culture. Without exception 99-100% of our students point out the strangeness of the culture which, of course, is their own. This exercise is a powerful tool for clarifying the depth of reflection we encourage and believe is necessary for the community of learners to maximize their learning in the course. It has set the tone for the course quite well in that the students express increased clarity from what they expected before entering the course and what they expect after attending the first class:

> . . .I came into the class on the first day, expecting that the class would introduce me to various ways to create a culturally rich environment within my future classroom. I expected to learn about how to display an appreciation of multiculturalism to my future students that goes well beyond simply hanging up posters on the wall depicting different racial groups. I was surprised to realize how much I will be learning about my personal belief system and myself as an individual. I anticipate critically thinking about the impact that my personal beliefs have on the way I will teach. . . .It seems interesting yet challenging to reflect on myself as a member of a larger cultural group and how my beliefs have shaped the person I have become. . . . (On line Discussion Forum, Spring 2008)

We then move our investigation to the practice of teacher introspection offered by Nitza Hildago. We believe that teachers must know who they are before competently

exploring the cultures of and that are relevant to their students. Accordingly, there is no more significant tool to developing a multicultural or culturally competent lens as an educator than that of self-reflection on one's practice and the beliefs and values that inform that practice. They are also introduced to the reflection process suggested by Hildalgo in order to begin organizing their thoughts about the use of reflection as a tool to examine and improve their practice as teachers. Hildalgo suggests that teachers engage in three phases of the introspection process: (1) examine one's cultural and social values; (2) develop an affective understanding of students' cultures; and (3) analyze how one's values and beliefs influence classroom practice (Hildago, 1993).

In this segment of the course, we also guide students through the exploration of social forces that contribute to who they are culturally based on privileged and targeted identities by examining the cycles of socialization and liberation as described by Bobbie Harro (2000a & 2000b). Students respond positively to this analysis of our development as humans and their individual development as they integrate this, apparently, new information that begins to allow them to see themselves in a socio-political context. In a Fall 2008 section of the course a student reflected upon Harro's "Cycles of Socialization and of Liberation," stating:

> The Cycle of Socialization made me realize how my own internalized oppression has come about. I chose to participate in the activity suggested by Bobbie Harro regarding the target and agent identities. As Harro had concluded, it was much easier for me to make a list of target identity examples than agent examples. It saddens me to think that our social identities were largely formed at a very young age, and we learn to take on the biases that our families and loved ones have had for decades.
>
> I was moved by the quote regarding how we can begin to break this cycle stating, "Until our discomfort becomes larger than our comfort, we will probably stay in this cycle" (Harro, p 20). I feel ashamed to have been silent for so long and now realize that just one voice **can** make a difference. I feel that I have been just as guilty as those individuals who are culturally biased for never standing up and speaking my mind. We are all Americans and want to be viewed as equals; we must unite and attempt to break this silence.
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> When reading "The Cycle of Liberation," I realized that I am in what the author described as in the "Getting Ready" phase. I want to learn more about others in different cultures and want to experience life outside my own comfort zone. In being able to reach out to others and feel a sense of liberation, I need to expose myself to new cultures and views. I hope to eventually feel as if I am part of a coalition with individuals who come from different backgrounds than my own, working together to create equality and justice. (Final Reflection, Fall 2008)

The Hildalgo and Harro texts assist the instructors in guiding students through their first assignment, the auto-ethnography. This is a two-part assignment that, first, asks the students to weave together a description of themselves as members of one or two cultural groups, and then illustrate how those memberships have contributed to the persons they view themselves as in the present. This part of the project

is assigned in the fourth or fifth week of the course just after they have explored reflection as a best practice and theories on race, culture, identity and schooling. Many times, we have found that students are, literally, stopping to think about how they were socialized for the first time. One student shared:

> This experience also allowed me to be open about many things that were painful in my life that stemmed from my race and gender, many things that I only expressed here…it has given me the courage to share. . .with my girls and my sisters. When I let one of my daughters read the first half of my auto ethnography, she wept… She wept for me. . .because she was angry and because she could relate. . . (Final reflection, Fall 2008)

This process serves to socially and culturally locate them in ways that empower them and, ultimately, their students. The student narrative above illustrates the power of sharing this process of introspection as well. Now, she may be able to better identify ways in which she may subconsciously communicate the painful messages she has received about race and gender through her interactions with students. And, through sharing what she uncovered, she can gain awareness of the similarities and differences between her and her students' constructions of race and gender. The auto-ethnography also frames students' experiences in the course for the semester. Without it, they often remain disconnected from the material and the concepts in the course because mere cognitive awareness has not typically promoted critical examination of self or the impact of our values and beliefs on others.

The second part of the project, assigned during the last unit of the course, is an analysis of the auto-ethnography in which they are asked to identify the themes (described by the authors when introducing the course) that emerge about the cultural groups to which they belong and how they were socialized. This analysis provides an opportunity to generate the important depth and seriousness of reflection and self-study that is necessary for educators who hope to apply the tools of cultural foundations in their work.

Prior to the first auto-ethnography assignment and after providing students with tools for reflection and examination of self as a cultural being, we introduce theoretical underpinnings of race, racism, and culture offered by Omi and Winant (2002), Tatum (2003), and Erikson (2004). Together, these scholars provide historical and ideological perspectives on race and culture as social constructs. Omi and Winant (2002) begin the conversation that illustrates to students that race is a social construct. They assert that if it can be constructed, it can be de-constructed as we know it to be given new meaning as ". . . an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (p.19). They eloquently take us through the varied conceptions of race from the 17th century to the present. This contribution to the course immediately introduces students to their possibility as change agents in the re-construction of what we might make it mean in the future. While the central focus of Tatum's (2003) text is racial identity development, we introduce the definition of racism "as a system of advantage based on race" offered in her book, it's distinction from racial prejudice, the costs of rac-

ism and who she believes is responsible for interrupting and eradicating this form of oppression. This investigation into theoretical perspectives on race and culture is completed by Erickson's (2004) perspective on culture, society, and schooling.

While this segment begins with an exploration of self as a cultural being, we transition to the theories of identity and learning in the next segment. Here, the instructor introduces the complexity of identity development, particularly, racial identity, according to Tatum (2003) and presents the central tenets and limitations of a number of theories discussed by Nieto and Bode (2008) that integrate perspectives on identity and their impact on learning, whether it is attributed to one's individual and familial identity alone or examined within a sociopolitical context. Here is where we deconstruct cultural deficit, economic and reproduction, cultural compatibility, and resistance theories that have attempted to explain why some students achieve and others fail in our nation's schools. This is where students in the Cultural Foundations of Education course begin to examine their own theoretical perspectives and find, many times, that the only one's to which they have been exposed are deficit and cultural incompatibility theories as the only possible explanations for patterns of school success or failure. These perspectives are shared, primarily, by our students from racial and class agent identity groups and, particularly, if they are pre-service teachers who have not been exposed to education studies prior to their experience in our courses. This pattern only reinforces our claim that American schooling, kindergarten to college, socializes students to believe that people of color and the poor are deficient according to our mainstream standard of education. And, our students, by and large, have learned that children have to be culturally remediated versus learning that the teacher needs higher levels of cultural competence to effectively facilitate learning. This phenomena not only calls for the need for courses like Cultural Foundations of Education but it also speaks to the urgency for educators to deconstruct these myths throughout teacher education programs.

Privilege, Oppression, and Identity Development

Educators must be aware of issues that may arise due to, at least, two factors: (1) differences between teachers' and students' backgrounds; and (2) how aspects of identity are framed and understood by teachers, parents, students, and school administrators. If we are to address and eventually eliminate educational inequities, we must first understand and work to eradicate current systems of power and privilege. The first step, as is the case with any systems change model, is to raise awareness about the problem and reflect upon how power and privilege affects and is perpetuated by individuals who are a part of those systems. With that end in mind, the authors engage in an exploration of privilege, oppression, and identity development with students in our second unit of the course. In many ways, this is a pivotal unit of the course because students will affirm their own identities as an initial step to begin the process of affirming their students' identities and determining how both educators' and students' identities affect learning.

Our assumption is that students who experience race, gender, religion, ethnicity,

social class, and sexual orientation, among others, as target identities are not deficient. In fact, we emphasize here and throughout the course that all people experience both target and agent identities (Bell, L. in Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Lorde, 1983; Tatum, 2003) and therefore participate as agents of oppression in some way in our lifetime. Additionally, these identities influence how they/we learn. While this has been interpreted by educators, most often, to mean that expectations must be lowered (Nieto & Bode, 2008), instead, we contend that it means that educators must acknowledge and use the information about students' identities to strengthen the development of our educational plans.

This unit is also the point in the course when significant change occurs in students' minds and, possibly, the instructor's as well. Careful to clarify how educators' identities have systemic implications, we move back to the systemic issues of power and privilege, beginning with White Privilege as we began our discourse with theories of race and racism. Mindful of the potential impact of our own racial identities as educators, we do not discuss race privilege until students are exposed to White authors discussing their own privilege (Jensen, 2003; Kendall, 2006; McIntosh, 1998; Wise, 2005). While students are introduced to a Black author's perspective on White identity development (Tatum, 2003) simultaneously, the experience in the classroom takes on a direction dictated by the level of social consciousness and resistance with which the students entered the course as well as the order in which individual students read the assigned texts. One student shared:

> I had trouble with this concept of White privilege until Jensen explained it. [Upon being challenged to think about why he had trouble until reading Jensen, the student said], I guess it was because he is a White guy. . . . (In Class Discussion, Spring 2007)

This brief example illuminated that there was the great possibility that the student was critical of all that had been shared that countered his beliefs about race and racism upon entering the course given the race of the instructor. After all, we are teaching these courses in a highly racialized society and cannot expect students to adjust their racial lenses just because they have an instructor of a different race. Accordingly, as we explore how identities are framed by students, teachers, and school administrators in schools, these instructors of the Cultural Foundations of Education course place our own identities at the center of the discourse to ensure that we create as much space for students to honestly and openly reveal their values and beliefs. As we do so, our experiences become the "life texts" that are expressions of the systemic components of oppression such as power and privilege that we analyze.

The exploration of White Privilege and how it is perpetuated in society and through schooling opens the discourse on other forms of oppression. As the course is currently designed, we continue our exploration of heterosexism, sexism, and homophobia in schools, disability oppression, and classism. Our goal is to not only examine these forms of oppression but to expose the consistent pattern of power and privilege among oppressions and how the intersection of these oppressions impact the teaching and learning process.

This segment appears to stimulate significant dissonance for students, depending upon their unique experiences and identities. As we explore the dimensions of various forms of oppression, a common thread across all course sections is that students express profound moments in which previous thoughts are shattered. For example, they experience White guilt, and share how they begin to challenge their own homophobia. In regard to his awareness, one student stated:

> . . . I regarded myself as hip and down with multiculturalism. Then I read the first article about white privilege and I realized I didn't know squat. (Final Reflection Paper, Fall 2008)

Yet others express dissonance, in the form of White guilt as in the following online posting:

> . . .I never thought I had any White privileges, but after reading the [McIntosh] list, I could sympathize with her list because I have experienced some of her daily effects of having white privileges. The one thing that I don't appreciate is the way it is portrayed that Whites have so much more authority over everyone else. I know that is the point of this topic of conversation, but I don't like how Whites seem to have the upper hand in numerous situations, it makes me feel like we are the ones that cause so many racist issues and biases. . . (On Line Discussion Forum, Fall 2008)

Here, the student acknowledges the existence of White privilege and her experience of that privilege but struggles with the reality of what it might communicate about her role in the perpetuation of racism in our society. The introduction to White privilege has apparently thrust the student into what Janet Helms calls the "disintegration status" of White identity development (Helms, 1995) which is marked by growing awareness of racism and White privilege followed by significant discomfort. The discomfort of the student in the quote above is made apparent by denying the validity of the information that is presented which Tatum suggests may happen at this stage of identity development (Tatum, 2003, p. 98).

Similarly, as the examination of White privilege causes a shift in some students, so do the discussions of sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia. While students, generally, accept that sexism exists, information shared about heterosexism and homophobia as derived from the foundational premises of sexism encourages a paradigm shift. Yet students do feel safe enough to publically discuss homophobia in their families:

> After reading *How Homophobia Hurts Everyone*, [Blumenfiled, 2005] I was deeply moved and reflective of what happens in my family. I have a sister who has openly admitted that she is now a lesbian after dating men for years. According to a quote in the text, " Until 1973, established psychiatric associations considered homosexuality a disorder or condition. People were often institutionalized against their will, made to undergo dangerous and humiliating "aversion therapy" and even lobotomized to alter their sexual desires." This stood out for me in the text because my own parents have said to my sister, "What's wrong with you?" or

> "You're not normal, go get some help because your lifestyle is disgusting! It's sick. God didn't make you this way!" My mother flat out does not allow my sister to bring her live-in partner to family functions because she doesn't want anyone else in the family to learn that my sister is now a lesbian. . . (Online Discussion Forum, Summer 2007)

In an attempt to continue to offer relevant topics for our particular students, disability oppression was added to the course, particularly because the graduate program in Special Education added the course to its requirements. Classism remained central to the course, but most notable is how this examination of the myth of meritocracy, affirmative action, and the invisibility of class in U.S. contexts, coupled with analysis of White privilege, causes White students to question their accomplishments. They question whether everything they have believed about what they have earned, in fact, was earned by their own merit or whether systemic racial privilege allowed them access to societal resources—employment, houses, etc., they might not otherwise have earned if all racial groups were granted equal opportunity. Even if students don't answer that question in the course, the questioning reveals that they are internalizing the critical examination of their own and their students' identities in a larger societal context.

Students are assigned to conduct an institutional observation during this unit that requires them to observe an educational institution and reflect on the influence and impact of issues of diversity and inequality in a classroom, curriculum, their own pedagogy, and/or the institution. If students are not teaching, they choose an observation site: a school in their neighborhood or a community center with programming for youth. They observe in this setting through the eyes of a sociologist, taking notes about what they see that speaks to the kinds of issues of diversity and inequality that are discussed in class and in the readings. They, then, transform these notes into a narrative that discusses how factors such as race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and/or disability play out in this setting; how the setting is structured (i.e., to benefit whom and in what ways? To include or exclude whom? Whose ways of learning, knowing, and/or communicating are valued or devalued and in what ways?). This assignment helps them exercise depth of focus that is not generally accessible when simply learning teaching methods. It broadens their perspectives on the dimensions of multicultural education beyond content integration to an equity pedagogy and to promotion of an empowering school culture and social structure. One student demonstrated the expansion of her definition of multicultural education as equity pedagogy in her observation:

> . . . Peggy McIntosh states. "I have come to see White privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day." The children in this classroom are indirectly learning that exact same concept. . .when a middle class Caucasian student forgot her homework, the teacher just said "Please bring it to me tomorrow." This was much different in comparison to how the low-income children, two of which were African-American students, who did not bring in two small rectangular boxes for the math homework [were treated]. The teacher gave

> a disapproving look to all three of the students and told them that she . . . hopes [that the] next time they will be more responsible. (Institutional Observation, Spring 2007)

It is important to note that both authors view the syllabus as a guide through the process and remain open to organic movement of the course as students shape the direction as well. No two semesters have been exactly the same given the unique mix of identities, personalities, teaching statuses, orientations toward schooling, and concepts of multicultural education including those held by the individual instructors. For example, recently, students reviewed a docudrama, *Daughter from Danang*, that depicts the experience of a woman, who was brought to the U.S. as part of Operation Baby Lift during the Vietnam War, being reconnected to her birth family. Operation Baby Lift was a U.S. government initiative that claimed to be assisting bi-racial children of American soldiers and Vietnamese women escape possible death at the hands of Vietnamese soldiers. Among the stories being told in the film, it illuminates how we make meaning in U.S. and Vietnam cultures that are quite distinctive and which complicate this otherwise joyful occasion. The authors assert that only once, in at least 10 sections of the course, did the dialogue challenge how our world views, as critically conscious and culturally competent educators, impact the learning environment for students who are adopted. Having an adopted student in one section of the course not only deepened the dialogue to another dimension of identity not explicitly explored in the course, but it affirmed the power of the process of inquiry.

While modeling a critical pedagogy to teach educators, we are obliged to use meta-cognitive moments to explore what is happening in our space and accordingly challenge our biases and those among some students while we maintain an advocacy role on behalf of the student who feels unheard and misunderstood by his/her classmates. In this course section, several students vilified the main character who they made solely responsible for all conflicts in communication illustrated in the film. The student who had been adopted and had the experience of finding her birth mother reacted strongly to her classmates as she disclosed her experience. Students continued to say things like "I respect your experience, but. . ." which, ultimately, invalidated her experience. In this instance the professor intervened, asking questions in a Socratic manner, such as "What keeps you from accepting (Student X's) experience as proof that something other than what you propose could be operating for the main character?" Eventually, students began to share that maybe there was another way to view how a person may not operate in a culturally competent way based on their lived experience and socialization. While this discussion opened a wound for the student who experienced shame around being adopted, she did follow up with the instructor to express gratitude for "having her back."

This incident affirmed the power of critical pedagogy where the process allowed all voices to be validated and placed the students in the position to critique their own cultural beliefs as part of the text to be interrogated.

Multicultural Education for Social Justice: Theory to Practice

In the third and final unit of the course students engage in the practice of curriculum critique and transformation. Our goal is to integrate critical education theory with classroom pedagogy. In order to influence their classroom pedagogy, we build on their knowledge and experience within their content area. The students are provided with numerous course readings, which serve as springboards for class discussion online and face-to-face, and serve as tools to help students in the process of thinking through their curriculum projects. In this unit we provide students with operational definitions of Multicultural Education from Nieto and Bode (2008) and Banks (2008). The Dimensions of Multicultural Education as defined by Banks (2008) include: (1) Content Integration; (2) The Knowledge Construction Process; (3) Prejudice Reduction/Anti-bias; (4) An Equity Pedagogy; and (5) An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure. The goals of Multicultural Education defined in Nieto and Bode (2008) are:

> • To help individuals gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures.
>
> • Multicultural education assumes that with acquaintance and understanding, respect may follow.
>
> • To provide students with cultural and ethnic alternatives.
>
> • To reduce the pain and discrimination that members of some ethnic and racial groups experience because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics.
>
> • To help students to master essential reading, writing and math skills.
>
> • To provide all students with the skills attitudes and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, within mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures. (Nieto & Bode, 2008)

After exploring frameworks in multicultural education and discussing the connection to the previous units the students are assigned to read a few examples of curriculum transformation in action. In *Cultural Competence: A Primer For Educators,* Diller and Moule (2008) provide an in depth description of culturally competent teaching and curriculum which provides our students with a comprehensive discussion of bias and how to detect bias in the context of K-12 classrooms. We use a specific chapter (Bias in the Curriculum and in the Classroom) in this text to help our students conceptualize the act of detecting bias. A teacher in an online section of this course posted the following story as a response to this text; we chose this specific post because it's an example that helped her peers "see" how theory can and should be transferred to practice.

> One striking example of the misuse of IQ testing is this. I had this little boy, who at age 5 years tested "into" the [Mental Retardation] MR program. He was no more MR than I, but he tested in that range, giving him an IQ of approximately

> 60/70 (qualifier to come to me), so he automatically was placed in the program…It was an extended family and teacher collaboration, which helped him excel. But, unfortunately, since he was already in the MR program, it was very hard to get out of it—his achievement scores ended up much higher than his IQ—he was close to grade level, but his IQ didn't get higher than a 70/80…Is the IQ still so culturally biased? I believe, that since the family didn't fight or know that was an option, despite the fact that I did, he had to stay in the MR program (had to get above 85 to be borderline—not in MR program)... Educators need to know this and need to help to revise the system and programming. (On Line Discussion Forum, Spring 2009)

In addition to Diller and Moule, students read several other examples of research that delves into the critical conversation of moving theory to practice. Skilton-Sylvester's (1994) qualitative study highlighting his experience teaching 3rd graders in Philadelphia helps our students see a teacher who actively transformed the curriculum and co-created knowledge with his students. An example of a student's reflection on this reading provides insight into the student perspective on this study:

> What Skilton Sylvester gave the students was real time valuable lessons of the structure of society. He taught them to "question, investigate, and interpret their experience of the world." By developing a classroom neighborhood that mimicked society he was expanding their knowledge of how and why society functions and what tools they could utilize to not only adapt to that society but change it as well. (On Line Discussion Forum, Summer 2008)

Another integral reading in the area of curriculum transformation includes a chapter in the Nieto and Bode (2008) text which provides concrete examples of curriculum transformation in various grade levels, such as a unit entitled Cambodians and the Cambodian American Experience, highlighted in this online post:

> This curriculum built an understanding among students of all backgrounds and could potentially help to motivate teachers and students to work together toward social change. I would love to do something like this in my school someday. All students would be having fun while at the same time understanding the history, developing inquiry, engaging with the specific culture community, affirming identity, and building an understanding about the specific culture. This would be a lot of work and last over a long period of time but I think it would be well worth it for every teacher and student in the school making a lasting impact even after they leave their classrooms. (On Line Discussion Forum, Fall 2008)

The pre-service teacher reflecting on multicultural education in the quote above has hope for change. This may be step one for this student and she will need support in her future teaching position but she has begun thinking critically about transferring theory to practice and that is an integral part for the work of multicultural educators. While we have chosen to highlight a few of the instrumental readings for this unit that all the students are required to read, the students are also required to seek other readings specific to their area of teaching.

Part of this unit is the culminating project for the course, a curriculum trans-

formation project. The project requires students to choose a piece of curriculum to critique, preferably a piece of curriculum they have already taught or plan to teach soon. The curriculum transformation project consists of three major parts, choosing the piece of curriculum to transform, critiquing it to find specific aspects to transform, and finally creating the new modified piece of curriculum. The following is an example of the curriculum transformation from a pair of students whose project reached the fourth level of curriculum transformation according to Banks (2008). The original lesson the students critiqued was a genealogy project that required students to create their family tree based on what they could find out about their biological family. They found that the only students who were included in the lesson were those who have access to information about their biological family members. Students who are raised by non-biological parents and/or students who have life experiences that may evoke negative emotional responses are excluded:

- Families with gay/lesbian parents.
- Families experiencing divorce.
- Foster families.
- Families created or expanded through adoption.
- Families experiencing death or illness.
- Families in which grandparents or relatives other than the parents have custody.
- Families with stepparents and stepsiblings.

In order to normalize the experience of all students and affirm all students' identities, these teachers created a new curriculum, entitled: "Expanding the Idea of Family Traits" that allowed their students to investigate environmental family traits. These traits were culture, traditions, celebrations, values, beliefs, religion, and language.

Changes in Course and Changes in Us

In the process of teaching this course both authors have thought a lot about the way the course has changed and how the course has changed us. As we experience a different student group in each of our courses every semester we reflect together on the needs of the students and how to consider our teaching to meet their needs. Although we teach the course separately, we plan and process together. This has been an integral part of the course development. One very specific example was the semester we both taught the course simultaneously for the first time. Prior to that semester, Erica taught this course using a syllabus that was already in place and it worked well, but there was a shift in thought once Rochelle began teaching the course. After her first semester teaching the course, Rochelle took note of the content that was lacking from the syllabus, key elements of importance for future educators such as ableism and homophobia. That was when the collaboration began. We thought about each assignment, each reading, each film, strategies for in class discussion and dialogue as well as role-play activities and simulations. In this collaboration we were able to draw upon our experiences teaching this course

and the ways in which we interpreted the students' reactions and responses to the concepts we explored. In addition to the experience teaching the course, we drew on our own personal and professional lived experiences.

When we teach this course we expose our own identities and offer slices of our lived experiences demonstrating the necessity of vulnerability in critical pedagogy. When we ask our students to reflect and analyze their own lives, we must do the same. We aim to build a learning community that is a safe place for students to share their experiences with privilege and oppression, which can be a great challenge, for our students and for us. The first time Erica taught this course she was in her second semester of her first full-time teaching position in higher education and it was her first experience teaching graduate level students. As Erica walked in the room she had a lot of doubt when she saw 24 White students, many older than her. Knowing the content of the syllabus and the resistance to discussions about institutional racism she had at professional job talks and conferences, specifically with White scholars she knew she was in for a challenging 15 weeks. However, what Erica did not expect in that challenge was how much her students would change her because she was so focused on how she would change them, of course assuming that they would all resist. The first lesson that they helped her better understand was diversity within the room of 24 White students, although she had encountered a lot of different kinds of White people in her life Erica was really moved by the wide range of ideologies and experiences in that room. For example, she had two deaf students in the class that semester and they taught her about their own struggle to be heard in a society that literally sees them as voiceless. These two students were integral to her learning about the movement with the deaf community to be deaf and proud. After that semester, Erica always shares the powerful experience she had when she listened to the deaf, not only in her course but in other professional and personal conversations as well.

Rochelle recalls her third semester teaching the course when she had a guest lecturer present on heterosexism and homophobia in schools, placing the experiences of gender variant children at the center of the discussion. While Rochelle is always transparent about her struggles to unlearn the many distancing messages she learned about homosexuality as a Christian, she had not heard the voices of gender-variant children. As the guest lecturer introduced her gender variant child and other children nine and 10 years old who wanted to die because of the gender normative behavior of adults, something shifted in her. Not only did the arbitrariness of gendering crystallize for her, she was brought to tears in class. She had a breakthrough as a learner that both strengthened her passion as an ally and deepened her understanding of the emotional toll the course may take on students.

Key Challenges

The key challenges we face in the process of teaching this course fall into three categories: Bias Checking; Meeting Students Where they are/Student Expectations;

and, Resistance. As multicultural educators, we are committed to modeling what we teach. The aforementioned challenges impact our ability to validate students' experiences, therefore, out of necessity, we had to challenge our own biases in favor and against varying perspectives of oppression and students' diverse levels of social consciousness. We have also had to become more skilled at meeting course objectives while remaining committed to meeting students where they are. And, we have taken on the immense task of identifying and working productively with students as they express resistance that is reflected in their assignments and their interactions with the instructor and other students.

Bias Checking

At the onset of teaching the course each instructor faced our concern about validating the experience of students who talked about experiences that we did not consider oppression. Some of those experiences were discrimination based on appearance such as hair color or weight, adoption, and the like. While we can emphatically assert that we care if any person is negatively affected psychologically, emotionally, or physically, we both filter what is considered oppression for the purposes of this course based on whether the identity and experience limit people from gaining access to social institutions and achieving what is ideally the American dream.

Concomitantly we reflected on our tendency to favor what was written and said during class by students who shared similar lived experiences to our own. Rochelle caught messages from teachers and mentors that they were harder on her because the world was going to be harder on her as a female and of a different race than the students. Although we say and want to believe that we challenge all students to push for excellence and deepen their investment in educational equity for all, we became keenly aware that we risk favoring and rewarding students who say and write what we believe. The concern is that we might give them better grades because they see what we see. For Rochelle, this challenge immediately raised the question about how one grades social consciousness during her first semester teaching the course. Both authors determined that when that same question is raised while grading, we would support the other by reviewing and suggesting a grade as a means for giving feedback. Rochelle adapted her assessment technique to allow students to be assessed by thoroughness of description and analysis with the students' particular level of consciousness in mind. This requires the instructor to get to know the students as well as possible in the first few weeks of the course. Activities in the course and Part I of the auto-ethnography that asks for description of their socialization as members of cultural groups provide significant information that lends to this knowledge of where the students begin the course, in terms of their social consciousness. Both instructors adapted this particular assignment into two parts and grade Part I at 25% and Part II at 75% and removed the requirement for analysis from Part I in order to take into account the varying levels of social consciousness, therefore the students' respective abilities to write well about one's socialization.

Student Expectation/Meeting Students Where They Are (Co-Construction of Knowledge/Epistemology)

Committed to meeting students where they are in the tradition of critical pedagogy, we strive to co-construct knowledge with students ranging from those who have been able to offer previously unchallenged contributions to class discussion such as ". . . that is interesting" to those who want to critique food, fun and festivals alone without consideration for social, political, and historical contexts in which such events occur to still others who look like us and think we will accept less than their best. While these are not the only challenges, they are the most common across both instructors' courses.

This range of voices has been challenging to the authors because of our passion for critical engagement of learners and our desire to break through the barrier to multicultural education in our schools. We also know that this may be our students' only opportunity in their program of study designed to help them gain a better understanding of the theoretical and ideological foundations upon which we make sense of practical tools and methods in addition to learning practical tools and methods for teaching and connecting with their students. We, therefore, expect to make significant progress with students as we set out to unlearn some thoroughly entrenched perspectives about education and expand definitions of best practice.

Rochelle experiences yet another challenge with the dialogic approach. While she believes in this approach to teaching and learning, without having had many examples to follow in her own experience, she often questions if students are devaluing the process because she is not using traditional methods that assume they are empty vessels to be filled through lecture. One student confirmed this suspicion when she said,

> I often wonder why we talk so much in (Rochelle's) class. Why would anyone want to know what I have to say. I am here to learn. (Class Discussion, Spring 2009)

This comment was offered in class immediately after a student's experience in a conference workshop where Freirian methodology was being introduced. Interestingly enough, her experience in the conference workshop validated her learning experience in the Cultural Foundations course. It is likely that this challenge will remain for the instructor given the prevalence of banking methods in schools as well as colleges and universities. The only decision to be made is whether to use traditional methods or not. While it will never be the sole method of instruction, Rochelle is considering incorporating more traditional methods at the beginning of the course to reach the cognitive learner who may be restricted by methods that are more affective or limited by experiencing a totally new instructional methodology that includes his/her voice as part of the knowledge valued in the course.

Resistance

While we could write an entire article on the resistance that is expressed in the

course and how we manage it while resisting the use of the power of our position to address it, we only want to note a few examples here given its prevalence. As one might expect, we experience resistance to discussions about race and racism because of the silence promoted in our current socio-political climate (Tatum, 2007). Rarely has discussion about race and racism, particularly inter-racial/inter-cultural discussion, been encouraged in our nation, least of all in a classroom. Students often express resistance by discussing completely unrelated subjects or not responding when students who want to talk, introduce questions such as "how did you feel. . .?" We know that we all have a feeling, yet students will sit in deafening silence until let off the hook by the speaker, which, unfortunately, happens often. As instructor, Rochelle tries to accommodate the direction in which the students take these moments recognizing their varied levels of racial identity development and so as not to assert her power to make them speak.

From our findings, another form of resistance emerges, usually expressed by teachers who work with younger students, is their insistence that children in early childhood years are too young to explore values, beliefs, power, and privilege despite overwhelming evidence that they can (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010; Olson, 2002; Pelo & Pelojoaquin, 2006; Tatum, 2003). We have an open and honest conversation with these early childhood teachers to try and understand their resistance and their misconception that they will taint the innocent children. The conversations we have with students include the fact that the idea of multicultural education cannot be limited to certain ages of children. In addition, it's important to expose young children to the goals (Nieto & Bode, 2008) and dimensions (Banks, 2008) of multicultural education at an early age because they are already aware of racial stereotypes. In her research with preschool age children, Tatum (2003) found that at the early age of three many children already held stereotypes regarding Native Americans. Furthermore, the inequities that exist in society do not exist in a vacuum so if teachers do not have these conversations with their young students, the children will not know how to interpret them and they will feed into stereotypes. Fortunately, there are resources available to help us guide the students when they face the challenge of identifying appropriate teaching resources. We have them read Pelos and Pelojoaquin (2006) article in the *Rethinking Schools* magazine entitled "Why We Banned Legos" which is a case study of two early childhood educators teaching about power and privilege to the youngest of our children.

Since these challenges have been so consistent across several years and every course section, we anticipate that they are challenges we must anticipate and continue to navigate as part of the process of moving students through this discourse toward equity and social justice in our society.

Implications

Schools continue to be organized and structured to perpetuate inequality (Wehmiller, 1992). As social institutions, schools reflect the perceptions and lived experiences of the dominant culture while leaving a multitude of voices unheard.

More importantly, our children continue to be the products of this inequality and it is time for schools to change these inequalities through providing spaces of resistance, coupling the discourse of critique with that of possibility and helping teachers play their role as transformative intellectuals.

Freire (1988) provides a clear vision of the roles of teachers as transformative intellectuals. His vision and concepts are rooted in the belief that "as intellectuals, teachers will combine reflection and action in the interest of empowering students with the skills and knowledge needed to address injustices and to be critical actors committed to developing a world free of oppression and exploitation" (1988, p. xxxiv).

Are the walls (of injustice) really tumbling down? We contend that they are as teachers have the possibility to function as transformative intellectuals through reflection and action in the interest of empowering students, thereby calling for a change in the traditional theoretical framework of teachers as authoritarians and students as passive learners (Darder, 2002, Delpit,1995, Freire, 1970 & 1988, Giroux, 1988 & 2002; Miron,1996).

Schools function as sites of struggle where teachers can critically explore their emancipatory potential as educators and public intellectuals. The political nature of classrooms entrenched in traditional notions of power, knowledge and truth that reproduce social categories of inequality, provides the context for the need of transformative intellectuals in schools at every level, from early childhood through higher education.

As we continue teaching this course to respond to the call to action as social justice educators we hope to instill this charge to our students as well. As described herein, we recognize the challenge of doing this work in an institutional setting. Higher education and specifically teacher education as an institution must continue to have this conversation and work towards social change within the structures that exist if we hope to transform the current educational inequities that still saturate classroom practices from early school experiences through higher education. Are the walls really tumbling down? Yes they are: brick by brick; student by student; teacher by teacher.

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